

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BONN 03381

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR GW US
SUBJECT: US-FRG RELATIONS: FRG PRESS BACKGROUNDER

REFS: (A) BONN 3178; (B) BONN 3181

1. FOREIGN OFFICE MINISTER OF STATE VON DOHNANYI HAS TAKEN THE UNPRECEDENTED STEP OF INVITING MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN PRESS CORPS FOR A WINE AND CHEESE BACKGROUNDER. AN AMERICAN JOURNALIST INFORMS US THAT ON FEBRUARY 20 THE FOREIGN OFFICE CALLED THE AMERICAN JOURNALISTS TO INVITE THEM TO MEET WITH VON DOHNANYI ON THE EVENING OF FEBRUARY 22 FOR A TOUR D'HORIZON. THE CALLS WERE THEN FOLLOWED UP WITH WRITTEN INVITATIONS.

2. VON DOHNANYI HAD NO FORMAL OPENING STATEMENT BUT SIMPLY INQUIRED ABOUT THE WORKING CONDITIONS OF THE JOURNALISTS AND ASKED WHETHER THEY HAD ANY SPECIAL TOPICS THEY WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS. THERE FOLLOWED A LONG AND WORTHWHILE DISCUSSION ON US-GERMAN RELATIONS, THE GERMAN ECONOMIC SITUATION, AND OTHER TOPICAL ISSUES SUCH AS THE ENHANCED RADIATION WEAPON.

3. ON US-FRG RELATIONS, VON DOHNANYI SPECIFICALLY
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REFERRED TO THE MOST RECENT "SPIEGEL" ARTICLE (REF B) AS AN EXAMPLE OF BAD AND INACCURATE REPORTING. HE STATED THAT THE USG UNDERSTOOD THAT THE "SPIEGEL" PIECE DID NOT ACCURATELY REFLECT FRG VIEWS.

4. ON THE ECONOMIC SITUATION, VON DOHNANYI STRESSED THAT THE MAJOR ISSUE WAS NOT INFLATION BUT LABOR COSTS

AND THE SIZE OF THE NATIONAL DEBT. HIS PRESENTATION, ACCORDING TO OUR SOURCE, FOLLOWED BASICALLY STATEMENTS RECENTLY ISSUED BY THE BUNDESBANK AND BY THE FRG MISSION TO THE EC IN BRUSSELS.

5. VON DOHNANYI'S COMMENTS ON THE ERW LEFT THE IMPRESSION THAT THE US SHOULD BE GIVEN FULL PLAY TO USE THE WEAPON AS A NEGOTIATING TOOL.

6. COMMENT: OUR SOURCE GAINED THE IMPRESSION THAT THIS EXTRAORDINARY MEETING REFLECTED FRG CONCERNS ABOUT ITS PUBLIC RELATIONS IMAGE AND AN EFFORT TO PORTRAY A MORE POSITIVE POSTURE. BEYOND THAT, WE WOULD SEE IT ALSO AS A PART OF A HIGH-LEVEL EFFORT TO CORRECT THE RECENT IMPRESSIONS IN THE PRESS OF GROWING FRICTION IN US-FRG RELATIONS. THE FACT THAT THE INVITATION FOR THE BACKGROUNDER WAS ISSUED ON THE SAME DAY THAT THE "SPIEGEL" PIECE APPEARED WAS PROBABLY NOT COINCIDENTAL.

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